

THE  
**RESILIENCE  
FACTOR:**

A Key to Leadership in  
African American and Hispanic Girls



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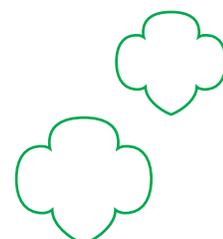
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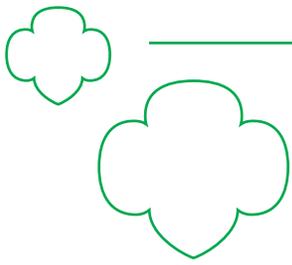
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## Introduction

The idea for this working paper was generated from questions raised from *Change It Up! What Girls Say About Redefining Leadership* (2008), a nationwide study conducted by the Girl Scout Research Institute (GSRI) which explored how youth ages 8 to 17 define, experience, and aspire to leadership. One of the key findings of this study revealed that girls are not a monolithic group and that there are differences among girls of diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds. What are some of these differences and how can they be understood within diverse cultural contexts? This paper explores these and other key questions using the concept of resilience as a framework based on recent literature focused on African American and Hispanic girls.

### **Leadership Aspirations Are High Among African American and Hispanic Girls**

Specifically, in *Change It Up!* African American and Hispanic girls were more likely than Caucasian and Asian American girls to view themselves as leaders. Also, African American and Hispanic girls aspired to leadership more than Caucasian girls and had more frequent and more positive leadership experiences. In addition, they rated themselves higher than Caucasian girls on key leadership indicators such as overall self-confidence and qualities such as creativity, caring, and problem solving. A higher proportion of African American girls also was represented in the “Vanguard” leadership identity category—a profile of youth who have the highest self-confidence, already think of themselves as leaders, and actively desire to be leaders.

These findings were further confirmed by a follow-up survey to *Change It Up!* that was conducted after the 2008 presidential election, *The New Leadership Landscape: What Girls Say About Election 2008* (2009). In this survey, the GSRI asked youth ages 13 to

17 across the United States about their perceptions and opinions of the prospective candidates in the 2008 presidential election and their own experiences in leadership activities. African American and Hispanic girls responded “often” or “very often” the same percentage or higher (sometimes significantly so) to having engaged in positive leadership-promoting experiences as compared to Caucasian and Asian girls. The types of experiences that African American and Hispanic girls participated in were the kinds of opportunities that girls said they value in leadership—notably collaborative decision making, an inclusive approach, and learning by sharing different perspectives. In particular, their responses pointed to girls’ individual and collective work, communication, problem-solving, and reflection processes which will be discussed in more detail later in this paper.

In addition, the girls in the study who shied away from leadership were, by and large, Caucasian girls who dealt with relational issues such as being afraid to speak up in public and voicing an opinion that others would not like. African American and Hispanic girls did not seem to have the same fears. This paper delves into some of the factors that may influence this sense of confidence.

### **Self-Confidence, Leadership, and Resilience**

As research often does, these findings created as many questions as answers. In both of these studies the factor that was most strongly linked to leadership was self-confidence. African American and Hispanic girls had higher levels of self-confidence and leadership aspirations than other girls in the studies. What is the root of this self-confidence? Are there cultural factors at play? This paper delves into the research on youth and resilience to further flesh out these issues.

The leadership field has emerged from thinking that individuals are born with leadership traits to a model in which leadership is shaped by experience

and social interactions. One concept that stands out in the work of intergenerational leadership researchers Bennis and Thomas (2002) is the idea of the “crucible of experience”—that going through a transformational experience that strengthens them can set people on a new path to leadership. The idea that some leaders go through an ordeal or test, surviving and acquiring new skills, character, and resolve, parallels the concept of resilience building in the youth development field.

There is no shortage of research in the field and media headlines about the struggles African American and Hispanic girls face as they deal with racial and gender oppression as well as economic, health, and education disparities. However, what’s revealed when strengths as well as struggles are scrutinized? Can strength be born from struggle? What experiences positively develop and transform African American and Hispanic girls as they face significant societal threats such as racism, xenophobia, economic disenfranchisement, educational and judicial inequity, and poor health care? Are some African American and Hispanic girls more resilient than other girls, giving them the confidence to be leaders? Or are some African American and Hispanic girls more confident than other girls, enabling them to be resilient and adapt to challenging situations?

Based on the research cited here, it appears that there is a continuous interchange and complex relationship between self-confidence, resilience, and leadership. Understanding that not all African American and Hispanic girls are resilient, this paper explores the family, school, community, and cultural protective factors that help develop girls who are considered resilient in the face of stressors. This paper explores the connection between the resilience and leadership of these girls, with the full understanding that the factors that develop their ability to survive and sometimes thrive through pressing societal risks and problems may not be the same skills necessary to help them overcome the root causes of these very same risks and problems, i.e.,

racism, economic disenfranchisement, educational and judicial inequity, and poor health care. Thus, this paper does not attempt to present solutions to the myriad problems of society nor does it claim that African American and Hispanic girls who are resilient may not also be deeply and negatively affected by these problems.

This paper also offers implications for youth-serving organizations in engaging African American and Hispanic girls and young women in leadership development, keeping in mind proven resilience factors such as connection to family, school, community, and culture.

## Definition and Factors of Resilience



The study of resilience in youth has evolved from a focus on what is remarkable in only an exceptional few to what is ordinary in many (Masten 2001). It has been defined in numerous ways: a process; enduring characteristic; capacity to adapt or thrive in the face of significant adversity; successful adaptation or negotiation with one’s surroundings despite threat; good outcomes despite high risk (Masten, Best, and Garmezy 1990; Condly 2006; Miller and Daniel 2007).

According to the American Psychological Association’s Task Force on Resilience and Strength in Black Children and Adolescents (TFRSBICA) (2008), resilience emerges as a process that is not defined by a list of protective factors (that which prevents or reduces vulnerability and promotes optimal development such as the availability of social support and healthy coping strategies) but is the interaction of one’s strengths, resources, and risk factors within context across space and time. Similarly, researchers of risk, resilience, and positive development among Hispanic youth also define resilience in interactional terms (Kuperminc et al. 2009).

For too many African American and Hispanic youth risk factors include exposure to poverty, discrimination, negative gender and ethnic stereotyping, low expectations, acculturative stress, traumatic migration experiences, educational and judicial/penal inequity, and inadequate health care. Recognizing and understanding risk factors is critical: It is a mistake to apply the constructs of risk and resilience to populations that are neither oppressed nor disadvantaged (Ungar 2004). Youth who are neither oppressed nor disadvantaged are less likely to experience the persistent and enduring risk factors that are known to compromise youth development. Resilience, as defined in this paper, is a characteristic that endures over time, space, and context in a framework where the risks and adversities are significant, persistent, and potentially compromising to youth's development.

### Resilience Factors Overview

Three main factors play a role in developing the resilience of youth:

- the young person herself or himself
- the family, which provides a significant degree of functioning, positive support, bonding, and stable discipline
- the community/environment, which provides a certain level of social support

However, for African American and Hispanic youth, a fourth key factor of culture and ethnic identity is highly significant in the development of resilience. These concepts will be explored in the following sections based on some of the most recent literature from the field. Findings from *Change It Up! What Girls Say About Redefining Leadership* will serve as a springboard for the discussion.

## Becoming Resilient African American and Hispanic Girls

For resilient African American and Hispanic girls and young women, many factors and experiences contribute to their strength: positive self-concepts; positive relationships with parents and family; supportive environments often considered home-places; cultures; religion; racial socialization, ethnic identities, and support networks.

### Positive Self-Concept

Consistent with data from *Change It Up! What Girls Say About Redefining Leadership* (2008) which finds that African American girls have higher rates of self-confidence, the American Psychological Association's TFRSBCA (2008) found that the self-esteem of African American children is higher than that of Caucasian children, and that the differences increase for African American girls as they grow older. Key factors that influence positive self concept are flexible gender roles, positive body image, and academic achievement.

Flexible gender roles predict positive social and psychological outcomes for African American adolescent girls (Belgrave et al. 2004; Buckley and Carter 2005). This is understood as possessing a mix of both masculine characteristics (typically seen as assertiveness, self-confidence, independence, responsibility, and individuality) and feminine characteristics (such as nurturance, emotional expressiveness, dependence, empathy, and community). Many African American girls and young women are socialized to possess such gender role flexibility, thereby developing self-confidence and resilience to face daily risk factors as they mature (Jones-DeWeever 2009).

Body image is also a core component of positive self-concept for African American girls and young





women. This is because many African American girls reject the mainstream media's standard of beauty—a characteristic that distinguishes them from Caucasian females—and accept in a positive way their own personal appearance and that of other African American females (Rozie-Battle 2002; GSRI 2004; TFRSBCA 2008; Jones-DeWeever 2009). At the same time that many African American girls and young women resist the marketing of contrary standards of beauty, some girls and young women can experience more intense pressure due to competition with each other based on hair texture, skin complexion, and intellectual capacity (Rozie-Battle 2002; Jones-DeWeever 2009).

While body image is a major factor in the positive self-concept of African American girls, other factors—cognitive ability and belongingness—impact that of Hispanic youth and differentiate the resilient from the non-resilient (Gordon 1996). Resilient Hispanic youth believe more in their cognitive abilities than those who are non-resilient. For example, they believe they could understand the information presented in class at school and do well on tests. Further, they are less likely to avoid social isolation and more resistant to negative peer pressure. They also place less emphasis on social belongingness within the context of school and more on their cognitive abilities in order to bolster motivation to reach their personal goals (Gordon 1996).

### **Positive Relationships with Parents and Family**

*Change It Up! What Girls Say About Redefining Leadership* (2008) reported that the influence of parents and family, particularly mothers, greatly impacts African American girls' leadership experiences and opportunities. More than eight in ten African American girls (82%) say their mothers encourage them to be leaders, followed by fathers and teachers (59%), friends (51%), and older relatives (50%). What is it about the relationship between mothers and daughters that promotes leadership development?

For African American girls who face poverty in their daily lives, an important factor in their resilience is how they see themselves in the future and how they perceive their mothers' care and involvement in their lives (Aronowitz and Morrison-Beedy 2004). This is important because being able to envision a positive future can impact the choices African American girls will make in the present. African American girls who perceive that their mothers care about them and who also have positive outlooks of themselves in the future were considered resilient in the face of stress.

Further, the relationships that African American girls have with their parents play a significant role in the development of their self-confidence and resilience. In addition, contrary to what the media touts, family structure matters less than the quality of relationships. A positive relationship with her parents and positive family functioning (strong emotional bonds among family members, monitoring of children's environments, etc.) are more critical to an African American girl's development of self-esteem than whether her home is a single-parent or two-parent home (Rozie-Battle 2002).

The positive relationships and influence of parents and family, particularly mothers, are also evident in Hispanic girls' leadership experiences and opportunities. As demonstrated in *Change It Up! What Girls Say About Redefining Leadership* (2008), three-quarters (75%) of Hispanic girls say their mothers encourage them to be leaders, followed by teachers (54%), fathers (50%), friends (48%), and siblings and older relatives (31%) (Schoenberg, Salmond, and Fleshman 2008).

Communication is at the center of positive relationships between Hispanic mothers and daughters. Mothers are important sources of strength and knowledge at home, in general, and for sensitive topics. In fact, many Hispanic girls feel very comfortable discussing sex and sexual issues like pregnancy and HIV/AIDS with their mothers, and even with extended family members (Guzmán, Arruda, and Ferial 2006).

This act of girls—seeking out what they needed for their healthy development—may be seen as an indication of their resilience. It should be noted, though, that not all girls feel this way and many Hispanic girls often feel that their parents do not know what to say, how to say it, or when to start those conversations (Sabatiuk and Flores 2009).

Hispanic adolescent girls learn valuable lessons on gender and sexuality from their mothers through conversations, *consejos* (advice), and *cuentos* (stories). Hispanic daughters and mothers both critiqued the gender restrictions and responsibilities they experienced while growing up—mothers more subtly and indirectly than daughters—and described their efforts to balance the reality of gender oppression and double standards with the possibility of transcending them (Ayala 2006). For example, both mothers and daughters assessed gender restrictions at home and elsewhere and spoke about new visions of how things could be. These restrictions include not being allowed out of the house although brothers are free to explore and being expected to date only one person whom they would ultimately marry. Other restrictions include responsibilities to the family that their male counterparts didn't share, such as cooking, cleaning, and caregiving (Ayala 2006).

### Creation of a “Home-Place”

In addition to parental involvement at home, many low-income, inner-city girls like the idea of a club as a “home-place,” a spot where they feel listened to and where their opinions are valued (Hirsch et al. 2000). This is an important finding for both informal and formal education as girls derive a sense of safe space from supportive and trusting environments. Even though literature has suggested that primarily middle-class Caucasian girls have suffered “loss of voice,” all girls need to be supported and it is important that urban girls of color be supported in establishing and maintaining a way to be heard (Hirsch et al. 2000).

The maintenance of social networks plays a very prominent role for all girls, even more than for boys (Hirsch et al. 2000). The creation of a home-place for youth enables the development of self via organizational responsiveness to girls' voices, strong bonds between girls and staff (as well as other adults working with girls such as volunteers), and the development of programs that fuse the interests of girls and adults (Hirsch et al. 2000). Just as extended families provide support for African Americans, particularly those from impoverished backgrounds, home-places have the potential of providing important sources of support and linkage for girls (Hirsch et al. 2000). Another important supportive environment in the lives of many African American girls is the church which is described in the next section.

Similar to the concept of home-place embraced by African American girls, safe spaces within schools also can shape the resilience of those Hispanic girls who are confronting poverty, discrimination, stereotypes, and urban violence (Lechuga 2006). The experiences of Hispanic middle school girls and mothers who participated in school-based, parent-run *salas comunitarias* (community living rooms) demonstrate that these community living rooms provided culturally empowering safe spaces for Hispanic girls, who described them as their second homes (Lopez and Lechuga 2006).

The psychological well-being of many Hispanic girls is related not only to their inner resources, but also to the quality of their interpersonal relationships (Thakral and Vera 2006). As *personalismo* (importance of interpersonal interactions and relationships) is a key cultural value, girls' interpersonal interactions and relationships with “other mothers” and other adults are crucial. Community living rooms also provided space for connecting with Hispanic “other mothers” with whom they enjoyed mutual trust and respect similar to the role that “other-mothers” have played in the African American community in nurturing the resilience of girls and their families (Lopez and Lechuga 2006).



## Religion

Findings from *Change It Up! What Girls Say About Redefining Leadership* (2008) revealed that the church is the third major place, outside of school and home, where African American girls and young women find opportunities for engagement and advocacy and where, for a majority of girls, leadership experiences have been positive.

Religion is central to the resilience of many African American youth and it may be a factor that influences leadership aspirations. Girls and young women who believe in God, attend church or religious activities, sense a higher purpose to their lives, and express empathy for others may become engaged leaders and advocates for their community (TFRSBCA 2008).

The African American church has been a positive factor in the lives of many African American youth. African American girls who highly value religion and their relationship with God tend to do better in school, have excellent relationships at home with their caregivers, and feel happy and good about themselves (Jones-DeWeever 2009). These same girls also tend to have aspirations of higher education, with most believing they have an excellent chance of achieving their ultimate goal (Jones-DeWeever 2009).

For many African American girls, church or religious involvement also serves as a protective factor against crime (Rozie-Battle 2002). African Americans positively associate public and private religion with self-esteem and involvement in the church, which offsets the negative effects of peer pressure and other stressors (Harrison-Hale, McLoyd, and Smedley 2004).

African American churches readily provide social and spiritual support, help shape social attitudes and belief systems, and build character, self-esteem, self-confidence, and unity (Harrison-Hale, McLoyd, and Smedley 2004; Swanson et al. 2002). Historically a safe haven, the African American church continues

to provide leadership in the struggle against racism and oppression (Barrow et al. 2007). The next section looks at how racial socialization and positive ethnic identity also promote resilience among African American girls.

## Cultural Values

Although religion may be very important for Hispanic girls and youth, in the research it does not appear to play a critical role in the development of their resilience, as it does for African American girls and youth. However, cultural values play a prominent function in developing resilience for Hispanic girls. Promoting cultural values within Hispanic communities protects against societal threats such as poor or inaccessible community resources and gang violence (Clauss-Ehlers and Levi 2002). For example, the cultural values of *familismo* (immediate and extended families as a unit), *respeto* (respect of elders), and *personalismo* (importance of interpersonal interactions and relationships) help Hispanic girls to be resilient.

The importance of loyalty and protection of the family to promoting resilience and leadership is also seen in the ways youth help to maintain family well-being by taking on responsibilities such as language brokering for their parents, chores, and sibling caregiving. These protective familial processes are associated with better social skills, competence, and higher levels of maturity, especially when youth feel their efforts are valued and acknowledged (Kuperminc et al. 2009). Prosocial behaviors of caregiving, nurturance, and sharing among siblings and family members foster responsibility for others and build close family relationships (Carlo and de Guzman 2009). In addition to building leadership skills because they require high levels of responsibility for others, these prosocial qualities may also help develop a strong sense of self.

Cultural values and family practices, however, sometimes conflict with younger Hispanics' desire



for self-empowerment and independence. Even the desire for leadership in and of itself may conflict with some cultural and family values and Hispanic girls need help negotiating this dilemma. Mexican young women in Castillo-Gallegos' (2006) research on constructing identities offered *consejos* (advice) to other young women their age, 14 to 18 years, on how to become self-empowered and independent. Their *consejos* highlighted three major points: have a network of support to help achieve personal goals; be self-directed and independent, placing themselves at the center of their lives and decision-making processes; and develop strength, determination, and faith. This advice may be of use to girls who are trying to negotiate the world of their families and their own identities as leaders in the larger world.

### **Racial Socialization, Ethnic Identity, And Support Networks**

Racial socialization and ethnic identity help African American girls cope with racism, oppression, poverty, and other risk factors such as pregnancy and drug use (Barrow et al. 2007). For African Americans racial identity begins with the recognition that racism is a reality that must be addressed so that family and community systems can be strengthened to support adolescents (Barrow et al. 2007, 408). Racial socialization, realized in part by promoting cultural pride and history in African Americans, has been associated with improved academic achievement, racial identity development, and cognitive and socioemotional outcomes—all related to resilience. (Brown 2008; TFRSBCA 2008). However racial membership alone is not sufficient to account for the self-esteem in African American girls: Racial socialization is key. It is their internal definitions of racial identity and their ways of identifying with being African American that account for their self-esteem (Buckley and Carter 2005). African American girls who describe themselves as “afrocentric”—being strongly in touch with their racial heritage—are more likely to say they are happy than African American girls who do not describe them-

selves as “afrocentric” or are not sure (Jones-DeWeever 2009). These girls are also more likely to express a more serious commitment to their present and future academic goals (Jones-DeWeever 2009).

This type of development also leads to healthier relationships. African American girls who participate in programming that focuses on ethnic identity, cultural beliefs and values, and sex role socialization demonstrate decreased relational aggression (Belgrave et al. 2004). This is important since girls and youth often look to their peers for acceptance, approval, or support. Perpetrators of relational aggression seek to damage the social acceptance and relationships of their victims by threats, retaliation, manipulation, or even coercion. Girls who put these negative, destructive behaviors to rest because of what they have learned about themselves—their ethnic identity and culture—demonstrate the impact that cultural protective factors can have. This holds great opportunity for families, schools, and community organizations to positively impact the healthy personal and social development of African American girls.

In addition to racial socialization and ethnic identity, social support networks have played an inherent role in the lives of African Americans (Brown 2008). For African American girls social support networks are comprised of adults to whom girls can turn and who are not related to them—such as someone who cared for them as children or a church family (Brown 2008). Within these networks that exist outside of the family some African American girls find help in coping with issues. Racial socialization and social support networks help them to gain understanding of gender-linked racial stereotypes and the prevalence of these stereotypes, a crucial part of their development (Swanson et al. 2002).

The impact of acculturation, and even enculturation, on the risk factors and protective factors of Hispanic youth in the United States cannot be underestimated. Acculturation is “the process by which individuals acquire knowledge, behavioral expectations,

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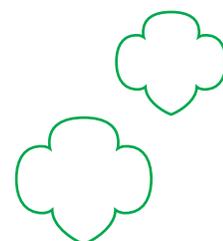
attitudes, and values associated with the host or mainstream culture”; Enculturation is “the process of acquiring knowledge, behavioral expectations, attitudes, and values associated with their ethnic culture” (Gonzales et al. 2004, 287-288).

Both acculturation and enculturation are important processes that together help minority youth determine the nature of the risks and protective resources to which they are exposed (Gonzales et al. 2004). Hispanic girls, as other minority youth, face the consequences of trying to navigate the incompatibilities of their cultures and the mainstream culture. For example, some Hispanic cultures hold collectivism and familism important, but the mainstream American culture places emphasis on individualism. These conflicts may also come into play when some Hispanic girls are considering leadership, whether they aspire to be leaders in their own cultural community and follow those role models or adopt leadership roles in the larger mainstream society.

Nonetheless, these same cultural values of family pride and loyalty, along with a strong ethnic identity acquired through enculturation, may serve as protective factors for Hispanic girls against some of the strains of acculturation (Gonzales et al. 2004; Clauss-Ehlers 2008; Clauss-Ehlers and Levi 2002; Holleran and Waller 2003; Kuperminc et al. 2009; Carlo and de Guzman 2009). The acculturative strains include lack of English language skills, immigration status, poor employment and economic status, educational background, and family life demands and values, which have been associated with anxiety, depression, alcohol abuse, and eating disorders (Negy, Schwartz, and Reig-Ferrer 2009).

Biculturalism is suggested to be an even more prominent protective factor for Hispanic and other ethnic minority youth. Bicultural youth know and participate in both the mainstream culture and their home cultures with fluency. For Hispanic youth, biculturalism has been related to skills and characteristics that shape resilience: greater self-

esteem, ability to socialize in diverse settings, peer competence, and psychological well-being (Gonzales et al. 2004). The skills inherent in living biculturally would seem useful in leadership roles that call for collaborating across groups of people with diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds.



# Resilience, Advocacy, and Leadership



In follow up survey work to *Change It Up! What Girls Say About Redefining Leadership* (2008) African American and Hispanic girls related that the kinds of leadership experiences they had involved taking action and initiative independently as well as working well with others. (See chart below.) For example, initiating projects, reflecting on one’s efforts, working with others to accomplish goals, and solving problems speak to the individual factors of resilience and advocacy. What is it about the leadership activities of African American and Hispanic girls that enables them to feel more effective in their leadership than Caucasian and Asian American girls do? The key here may be that they are better skilled in advocacy on behalf of themselves and others. The next section explores this issue further and discusses the role of advocacy in resilience and leadership development.

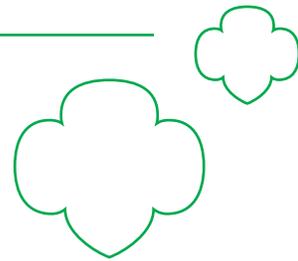
In the face of adversity and risk, advocacy by youth for themselves and other youth promotes resilience and positive self-concepts (Grover 2005). Youth advocating for themselves and others is an element of leadership, in particular, where they learn to take action on issues important to them within local and global communities. Many African American youth in particular have been involved in a model of social action and community development that has also often afforded them the psychological ability to resist and effectively cope with racism (Thomas, Davidson, and McAdoo 2008). Girls and boys advocate for themselves and their community, effectively becoming active agents positively transforming their environments. As a result, they resist the pressures of drug and gang involvement, and other risky, antisocial behaviors. A key benefit of engaging in advocacy is that it helps develop a positive sense of self, competency, and political efficacy (Thomas, Davidson, and McAdoo 2008). Organizations that operate using a resilience framework help to facilitate the power of youth and communities to speak for themselves and others (Yates and Masten 2004).

## Percentage of Girls Who Said “Often” or “Very Often” to Participating in the Following Leadership Activities

(Source: Girl Scout Research Institute, 2009. *The New Leadership Landscape: What Girls Say About Election 2008*).

	Caucasian	African American	Hispanic	Asian American
Feel like you belong in a group of your peers	67%	70%	68%	70%
Think about what you have learned	60%	<b>74%</b>	<b>67%</b>	67%
Work together with your peers to accomplish a mutual goal	61%	<b>73%</b>	65%	63%
Challenge yourself by trying new things	56%	<b>70%</b>	<b>62%</b>	60%
Have your ideas and suggestions taken seriously by adults in your life	59%	64%	63%	51%
Come up with solutions to problems and work to implement them	51%	<b>64%</b>	<b>64%</b>	63%
Learn about other people’s views and opinions in order to find common ground	52%	<b>60%</b>	<b>62%</b>	<b>65%</b>
Initiate and plan a project or activity	48%	<b>58%</b>	52%	53%

\*Percentages in green, bold font indicate a statistically significant difference.



Unfortunately, youth's advocacy efforts are not always welcomed. Youth's individual and group advocacy efforts are sometimes suppressed and resisted by adults who feel that such youth advocacy efforts must fit into adult agendas and models (Grover 2005). Although resilient behavior engaged in by highly vulnerable children may not always be socially acceptable, children can often be supported in developing self-advocacy or advocacy for others that is considered socially acceptable (Grover 2005, 534). This is where organizational models such as Girl Scouts of the USA's Girl Scout Leadership Experience have developed strategies to promote girl leadership using concepts such as advocacy and skill development that foster resilience at the same time. The next section discusses the Girl Scout Leadership Experience and the outcomes that simultaneously build resilience and leadership.

## Resilience and the Girl Scout Leadership Experience

Opportunities for leadership development are incorporated into the Girl Scout Leadership Experience which engages girls in activities where they are "discovering themselves and their values, connecting with others in the local and global communities, and taking action to make the world a better place" (James and Archibald 2009, 4). Built on a definition of leadership that girls appreciate, understand, and believe in, the Girl Scout Leadership Experience is driven by three Girl Scout processes: girl led, learning by doing, and cooperative learning (Girl Scouts of the USA 2008).

These processes can occur individually or together in Girl Scout activities. Girl led means that girls of every age take an active role in figuring out the what, where, when, why, and how of what they do. Learning by doing is hands-on learning that engages girls in an ongoing cycle of action and reflection. Cooperative learning is designed to promote sharing of knowledge, skills, and learning in an atmosphere of respect and cooperation as girls work together on goals that can only be accomplished with the help of others (James and Archibald 2009, 4). Without these processes and supportive adults, girls are less likely to achieve the intended 15 short-term and intermediate leadership outcomes of Girl Scouting .



**The 15 Short-Term and Intermediate Girl Scout Leadership Outcomes (Girl Scouts of the USA 2008)**

<b>Leadership Keys</b>	<b>Girl Scout Leadership Outcomes</b>
<b>Discover</b>	<b>Girls develop a strong sense of self.</b>
	Girls develop positive values.
	Girls gain practical life skills.
	Girls seek challenges in the world.
	<b>Girls develop critical thinking.</b>
<b>Connect</b>	<b>Girls develop healthy relationships.</b>
	<b>Girls promote cooperation and team building.</b>
	<b>Girls can resolve conflicts.</b>
	Girls advance diversity in a multicultural world.
	<b>Girls feel connected to their communities, locally and globally.</b>
<b>Take Action</b>	<b>Girls can identify community needs.</b>
	<b>Girls are resourceful problem solvers.</b>
	<b>Girls advocate for themselves and others, locally and globally.</b>
	Girls educate and inspire others to act.
	Girls feel empowered to make a difference in the world.

*Bold font indicates outcomes reflective of resilience factors for African American and Hispanic girls and young women*

More than half of the 15 intended outcomes of the Girl Scout Leadership Experience, in concert with the Girl Scout processes, reflect the individual (positive self-concept, flexibility/adaptability, critical mindedness), community (communalism/collective agency, advocacy, religion), and cultural (cultural values, extended families, supportive adults) protective factors and processes that help develop resilience in African American and Hispanic girls and young women. (See table above for the 15 outcomes. Those outcomes specific to resilience factors for African American and Hispanic girls and young women are indicated in bold font.)

Further, these outcomes and processes reflect the programmatic characteristics that researchers and scholars of youth development have recommended for the healthy development of youth (Nicholson, Collins, and Holmer 2004; Grover 2005; Kress 2006; Pittman 1999; Larson et al. 2004).

It is within safe and supportive environments that girls initiate and share leadership responsibilities about the design, planning, implementation, evaluation, and impact of activities on their lives and the lives of others. Girls in Girl Scouting benefit from working with able and trusted adult partners and their peers to develop the skills that will enable them to become leaders of courage, confidence, and character who make the world a better place for today and tomorrow.

Since being a leader is important to 70% of African American girls and 66% of Hispanic girls (GSUSA 2008), Girl Scouting has a profound opportunity to positively impact and develop leaders for today and tomorrow in diverse families and communities throughout the United States. In addition, this research points to the need for organizations such as Girl Scouting to become even more attuned to the culture and context in which youth live, and understand how the implementation of program and advocacy efforts relate to those forces.

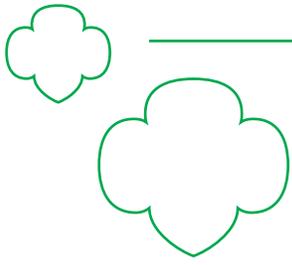
## Implications

By exploring the questions of leadership aspirations, experiences, and development of African American and Hispanic girls through the lens of resilience, a more detailed picture of their individual, familial, communal, and cultural foundations and support systems emerges. These foundations and systems help them to fight against and overcome the enduring, development-compromising, persistent risks many of them face. Through this struggle evolves their self-confidence, their positive development, and their transformation into the leaders they are and aspire to be. The following are implications from this research to consider when conducting research with African American and Hispanic youth as well as when working with them directly.

- **Leadership development models built solely on age or stage in life miss other critical factors** that define who girls are, what they need, and the richness of what they have to offer. A leadership development model for girls should take into consideration all that girls are and give them opportunities to learn by doing—to have and use their voice and decision-making skills to influence issues important to them. By doing such, youth organizations not only further develop

leadership skills in African American and Hispanic girls, many of whom actively desire to be leaders and participate in leadership activities already, but also help engender school, community, and even cultural protective factors that develop African American and Hispanic girls' resilience.

- **Youth-serving and youth-intervening organizations and agencies need to involve young people in planning and decision-making** about their own futures so they can enhance their competency for self-advocacy and advocacy for peers. Lessons can be learned from African American youth who demonstrate that partaking in such advocacy further encourages youth to develop and exercise leadership while effecting concrete changes in their communities (Thomas, Davidson, and McAdoo 2008).
- **There are still major gaps in the literature on Hispanic youth, in particular, girls and young women** (Kuperminc et al. 2009). Careful attention must be paid to research and program design with Hispanic populations as they are not a monolingual, monocultural, or monolithic group. Thus, culturally competent measures and meaningful models of youth's development must be designed (Carlo and de Guzman 2009).
- **Apart from the more common similarities of girls from Hispanic cultures and nationalities, there are substantive differences** in terms of racialization, citizenship, generation, class backgrounds, family structures, cultural practices, migration, and resistance strategies (Lopez 2006; Kuperminc et al. 2009). For African American girls and other girls of African heritage, there are also substantive differences in class backgrounds, family structures, cultural practices, and resistance strategies. These issues must be addressed in research and program design as well.



## Where Do We Go from Here?

Answers to the following questions may help fill in gaps in research about the resilience of African American and Hispanic girls as well as offer insights about the positive and promising aspects of their lives.

- What kinds of leadership experiences do African American and Hispanic girls describe as powerful?
- In what contexts do the leadership experiences of African American and Hispanic girls take place?
- What kinds of issues do African American and Hispanic girls want to address in their communities?
- What role models for leadership do African American and Hispanic girls have in their communities?

- What is the role of ambition as it relates to leadership among African American and Hispanic girls?
- How can we change the way African American and Hispanic girls are viewed in the larger culture with respect to self-confidence, resilience, and leadership?

Youth-serving organizations, schools, communities, community institutions, and society at large have great opportunities and potential to develop not only the resilience of African American and Hispanic girls, but also to further develop their leadership skills. Together with families, supportive adults during and after school, mentors, “other-mothers,” church and community elders, and other adults, African American and Hispanic youth can develop the resilience and leadership required to take ownership of and participate in their own healthy development.

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## Resources

### **American Psychological Association**

Advances psychology as a science and profession and as a means of promoting health, education, and human welfare.  
[www.apa.org](http://www.apa.org)

### **Children, Youth, and Families at Risk Program (CYFAR)**

Promotes building resilience and protective factors in youth, families, and communities.  
[www.csrees.usda.gov/nea/family/cyfar/cyfar.html](http://www.csrees.usda.gov/nea/family/cyfar/cyfar.html)

### **Children, Youth, and Families Education and Research Network**

Brings together the best children, youth, and family resources of all the public land-grant universities in the United States.  
[www.cyfernet.org/](http://www.cyfernet.org/)

### **Girl Scouts of the USA**

Girl Scouting builds girls of courage, confidence, and character, who make the world a better place.  
[www.girlscouts.org](http://www.girlscouts.org)

### **Raising Resilient Children Foundation**

Disseminates information to help adults raise and support resilient and hopeful children.  
[www.raisingresilientkids.com/](http://www.raisingresilientkids.com/)

### **Resilience Net**

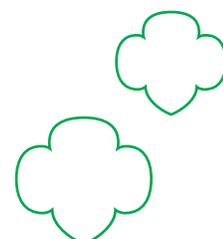
Brings together information about the development and expression of human resilience, particularly in children, youth, and families.  
[www.resilnet.uiuc.edu/](http://www.resilnet.uiuc.edu/)

### **Search Institute**

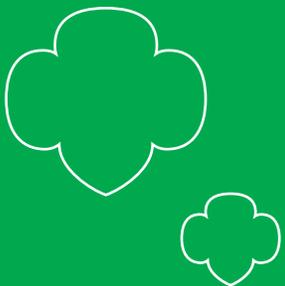
Provides leadership, knowledge, and resources to promote healthy children, youth, and communities.  
[www.search-institute.org](http://www.search-institute.org)

### **United States Department of Health and Human Services**

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